DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 287 511 IR 052 198

AUTHOR	Walch, Victoria Irons
TITLE	Conference on Information Resources for Archivists and Records Administrators. Final Report. Summary of Proceedings (Washington, D.C., June 19-20, 1987).
INSTITUTION	National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators, Albany, NY.
SPONS AGENCY	National Historical Publications and Records Commission, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	5 Aug 87
NOTE	11p.; For a related report, see IR 052 199.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Conference Proceedings (021) -- Viewpoints (120)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Access to Information; *Archives; Cooperative Planning; Information Dissemination; Information Needs; *Information Sources; *National Organizations; *Professional Associations; Program Development
IDENTIFIERS	*Archives and Records Information Coalition; Archivists; National Archives and Records Administration; *Records Management

ABSTRACT

This final report provides a summary of the proceedings of a conference designed to discuss and decide on means to improve information exchange among archivists and records administrators, based on the recommendations contained in a study of information exchange needs entitled, "Information Resources for Archivists and Records Administrators," prepared by Victoria Irons Walch. The summary of conference activities includes: (1) introductory remarks; (2) a report from the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) on the role it is willing to play in enhancing information services within the records community; (3) a general discussion of the NARA report and its implications; (4) discussion of a proposal to create the Archives and Records Information Coalition (ARIC); (5) actions for implementing ARIC to be requested from participants' governing boards; and (6) announcements and publicity. Actions following the conference are also summarized, including distribution of a press release, preparation of the report on the conference, and recommended actions by the National Association for Archives and Records Administration (NAGARA) governing boards. A listing of conference participants and the organizations they represented is included. (KM)

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CONFERENCE ON INFORMATION RESOURCES

FOR ARCHIVISTS AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATORS

Washington, DC
June 19-20, 1987

FINAL REPORT

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

The conference convened at 9:15 am on June 19 in Room 105 of the National Archives Building with 28 participants in attendance representing 5 federal agencies and 11 national professional associations (a list of participants is attached). The conference was sponsored by the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators (NAGARA) and funded by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC). The purpose of the conference was to discuss and decide on means to improve information exchange among archivists and records administrators, based on the recommendations in the report, Information Resources for Archivists and Records Administrators, prepared by Victoria Irons Walch. This report concluded a study of information exchange needs which was also sponsored by NAGARA and funded by NHPRC.

Introductory Remarks

John Burns, Vice President of NAGARA, welcomed the conference participants. He spoke of the broad need for better information about record keeping practices and procedures and of his personal experience in attempting to address this need through the establishment of an information clearinghouse in the California State Archives.

Bruce Dearstyne, NAGARA's Executive Director, then summarized the agenda for the conference and provided a list of six questions that he hoped would provide a framework for the discussion period: (1) What services and functions do the participants want an information center to provide? (2) Should there be one clearinghouse or more than one? (3) Which organization(s) will take primary responsibility for the center and how will its services relate to other functions of the organization(s)? (4) What are the other organizations willing to do, pay, or contribute toward the operation/success of the center? (5) What will the members of each professional association want and expect from the center? and (6) How will we move ahead to implement the desired actions? He then asked the participants to introduce themselves, identifying the organizations that they were representing and their specific interest in promoting better information services in the records community.

Richard Jacobs, acting Executive Director of the NHPRC, extended his own welcome and expressed the Commission's continuing interest in

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efforts to improve professional practice and to encourage cooperation among various groups within the field toward resolving common problems.

Victoria Walch, consulting archivist to the NAGARA-sponsored project, summarized the key points of the project's final report, Information Resources for Archivists and Records Administrators. She encouraged the participants to use the needs identified in the report to measure the potential value of any proposed solutions developed during the conference. First, an archives and records information center should serve all members of the records community, including archivists and manuscript curators, records and information managers, allied professionals (e.g., librarians, micrographics specialists), and government officials, especially those at the local level. Second, the products and services the records community identified as most important included copies of standards and models, technical information and guidelines, management data and statistics, bibliographic control of archives and records literature, directory service and referrals, and advocacy and explanatory materials. Third, the factors that are likely to contribute most to the center's success include experienced and motivated personnel; effective information gathering mechanisms; a single, centralized operation for dissemination; an active rather than reactive approach; tiered delivery of services; realistic expectations and limits on scope and quantity of service; and a self-supporting budget.

Maxine Sitts, information specialist for the Office of Management Studies in the Association of Research Libraries, then offered observations from her experience as coordinator of the Systems and Procedures Exchange Center (SPEC). Using her four "G"s as a framework--the Goals, the Givens, the Gaps, and the eGads--she described the establishment and growth of SPEC over its 14-year history. She observed that they are constantly adjusting their services. They have found it essential to maintain ongoing communication with their clients and sustain high visibility through the use of a distinctive logo and regular mailings. They strive to make it simple for potential respondents to provide the clearinghouse with information and minimize risk through the use of small test programs and staged approaches in developing new services or activities.

Report from the National Archives

Frank Burke, Acting Archivist of the United States, described the role the National Archives is willing to play in enhancing information services within the records community. His report was supplemented by comments from several NARA staff members, in particular Trudy Peterson, head of the Office of the National Archives under whose jurisdiction the National Archives Library falls, and Adrienne Thomas, director of the Program Policy and Evaluation Division whose staff had primary responsibility for analyzing the implications of the project's final report especially from a NARA management standpoint.

Burke described three parts of the information process: (1) collection of the information, (2) identification and dissemination of information about the information, and (3) proactive packaging and

dissemination of the information itself. The National Archives is willing and has already begun to take the necessary steps toward numbers (1) and (2).

The primary focus of this activity will be the expansion of the acquisitions policy and services in the National Archives Library, which may be renamed to more accurately reflect its expanded functions. Burke observed that the expanded library functions are designed to better meet internal NARA staff needs but could also serve as a central information point for the archival/records community. The library can best serve as a central point for the development of automated databases for archival information, and continue to make its materials available through interlibrary loans and reference services. The potential for ready access and dissemination nationwide is enhanced by the existence of NARA's 30 facilities across the United States, including eight presidential libraries, 11 field branches, and 14 federal records centers. As plans for increasing the sophistication of NARA's automated systems are realized, information compiled and collected by the library can be disseminated through this network of facilities.

Burke described several services cited as desirable in the project's final report that the library can and will provide.

Lists of archival information sources and/or providers of services could be provided on request. This information would be maintained in the NARA library which could respond to specific questions from anyone in the records community. Telephone answers would be provided at no charge. Duplicated copies of this information would be available at the standard NARA reproduction fee.

Annual listings of significant projects sponsored by NHPRC and NEH could also be provided on request. Additionally NARA will also provide information about its own archival research projects and can investigate providing this type of information for projects undertaken by the Library of Congress and the Public Archives of Canada. Synopses of work in progress and final results would not be included. Telephone answers would be provided at no charge. Duplicated copies of this information would cost the standard NARA reproduction fee.

An automated bibliographic database is already being developed for archival literature. Printouts of searches of this database could be made available to all in the records community at standard reproduction fees.

A newsletter on information services will be investigated to determine if its production is feasible. It is important to understand that if it were determined that a newsletter would be a valuable method of fostering shared archival information, approval from the Office of Management and Budget would be required before its initiation.

A brochure will be produced to outline the services that the NARA library will provide. The brochure would be distributed without charge.

The National Archives believes that its library ought to be the foremost depository in the country for information on the administration of archives and records and has already begun to develop a broadened and more assertive acquisitions policy that will help achieve this end. It will seek materials relating to the entire life cycle of records created by public and private entities. It will include materials in English and the major European languages. Archival and records organizations could assist NARA to build the library collections by donating copies of appropriate printed materials. The new acquisitions criteria under development will apply to any materials received by donation and NARA will of course reserve the right to retain only those materials that are compatible with these official criteria.

Finally, the National Archives expressed its hope that another institution or an association of organizations might take on some of the other activities cited in the project final report that fall under the third area of the information process cited at the outset by Burke, i.e., the proactive packaging and dissemination of the information itself. While important, it is not a function easily provided by the National Archives for a whole range of economic, political, and managerial reasons.

Discussion

The conference participants then turned to a general discussion of the NARA report and its implications. Initially, most were concerned with clarifying their understanding of how broad the library's acquisition policy would be and how extensive its services would become. Burke and Peterson reemphasized their intentions to make the acquisitions policy as broad as possible in order to cover every aspect of archives and records administration. The only expressly defined limits at this time are that they will collect only published materials and do not intend to attempt to assemble a comprehensive collection of finding aids.

The services to be provided by the library were likened to a wheel, i.e., a referral service to which a question is posed, that can provide limited basic information, but then turns and directs the questioner off to the appropriate source for additional help. The intent is to collect and disseminate existing information, not to conduct research on behalf of the inquirer. Anyone will be able to call or write to the library with a question, large or small. Responses delivered orally by telephone or in person would be provided free of charge, even if they entailed a database search. Responses delivered in writing, particularly in the form of printouts from the database or photocopies made from items in the collection, would be provided at cost.

The staff is not yet certain whether the bibliographical data base will include only what is physically in the library collections or

whether it will be broadened to include materials not part of the holdings of the National Archives Library.

The concept of repackaging information by outside organizations was raised several times. It is perfectly legal and a widespread practice for private organizations to take government-produced information, reorganize or tailor it to appeal to the needs of a specific audience, and publish and sell the resulting documents at sometimes significant profit. The National Archives would encourage organizations and individuals to use the information they will be gathering. Representatives of several organizations described a number of potential products that their constituents would benefit from.

Formation of the Archives and Records Information Coalition (ARIC)

The participants began to explore how the professional associations could most effectively interact with NARA and with each other to provide the necessary mechanisms for using, repackaging when desirable, and disseminating information to the records community at large. Many of the associations approached this area with some concern that any new undertaking not encroach upon their existing publications programs from which they obtain a significant portion of their operating budgets.

The group saw a need for a coordinating body that could survey the state of the literature, keep each organization informed about projects underway in the others, and identify gaps in the existing literature that are not being addressed by any ongoing projects. The group could then collectively determine what technical publications or other products could be produced to fill the need, could suggest what operational channels to use to accomplish the task, and could solicit a sponsor for particular projects among the participating organizations or from other organizations.

The group decided to propose the creation of the Archives and Records Information Coalition (ARIC) comprised of representatives from the American Association for State and Local History, the Association for Information and Image Management, the Association of Records Managers and Administrators, the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators, and the Society of American Archivists, as well as the Library of Congress and the National Archives and Records Administration. ARIC's functions and responsibilities will include

(1) Convening representatives from archival and records management groups on an annual basis to discuss archives and records management information exchange issues.

(2) Serving as a forum to facilitate distribution of materials and information, reports, statements of standards, and descriptions of projects underway prepared by the participating organizations.

(3) Determining the need for publications and topical kits and soliciting sponsors or cosponsors for producing and distributing them.

(4) Determining the need for reports or special studies and soliciting sponsors or cosponsors for undertaking them.

(5) Consulting with the National Archives on the development of its products and services.

The ARIC would be chaired on a rotating basis (in alphabetical order) by a representative of one of the five professional associations. It will meet once each year, probably in the spring at the National Archives. The organizations will be responsible for covering the expenses associated with their representative's participation. It was pointed out that the potential revenue that could be generated by each organization from publications endorsed by ARIC should help offset the expense of participating in the group.

There was some concern about the use of a rotating chair. Some were also uncomfortable with the informal, rather unstructured nature of ARIC's proposed participation policy and the fact that there was strong insistence that it exist as a "nonorganization." Common to both concerns was the worry that there might be little continuity and that its administration and follow-through could be uneven, thereby jeopardizing ARIC's ultimate ability to accomplish much of substance. Proponents of ARIC as proposed cited the successful Joint AHA/OAH/SAA Committee on Historians and Archivists as a precedent for the rotating chair. However, the majority of the group opposed the creation of another independent organization.

Several participants urged the group to consider actively involving representatives from the American Library Association and the Special Libraries Association. They cited a significant interest among ALA and SLA members in archives and records issues and pointed out that the technical publications and standards that seemed to be at the heart of the ARIC's concerns would be of special interest to the people who manage archives as part of libraries.

Another constituent group not represented directly on the ARIC but with deep and long-standing interest in better information about record keeping practices is that of local government officials. The possibility of including a representative from the International Institute of Municipal Clerks was raised.

The consensus, in regard to both additional library and/or local government participation, was to limit the core membership to the five most closely concerned associations plus NARA and the Library of Congress. However, the participants who will participate in ARIC (assuming approval of their governing boards) affirmed their intentions to be as inclusive as possible when ARIC undertakes its work. There was also some discussion of inviting representatives of the funding agencies -- particularly NEH and NHPRC -- to attend the yearly meetings.

The rotating chair will have the prerogative, indeed apparently will be encouraged, to invite as many representatives from other interested organizations as possible and appropriate to ARIC's yearly meetings. There was also an assertion that it is incumbent upon the participating organizations to ensure that ARIC properly and comprehensively addresses the needs of all of the constituent groups that could benefit from its products.

Request for Approval from Governing Boards

The participants agreed that the first step in implementing ARIC was to return to their respective governing boards with a report from the meeting that would ask them to take the following actions:

(1) Endorse, welcome, and praise the commitment of the National Archives to play a key role in improving information resources for archivists and records administrators by broadening and invigorating the National Archives Library's acquisitions program and by enhancing its databases to provide more extensive bibliographic and information retrieval services.

(2) Endorse and support the creation of the Archives and Records Information Coalition (ARIC) whose specific functions and responsibilities are delineated on pages 4-5 of this report. The organizations will agree to serve, on a rotating basis, as convenors of ARIC and will send their representative to ARIC's first meeting, tentatively scheduled for March 10 and 11, 1988.

(3) Issue an appeal to potential funding agencies to give full and serious consideration to projects initiated or endorsed by ARIC.

Although it is obviously the prerogative of each organization to name its own representative, it was strongly suggested that, in the name of continuity, the executive director or other senior staff member might be the most appropriate designee.

The National Archives representatives indicated that they could prepare several items in time to bring them to a March 1988 meeting. They will provide a draft of their broadened solicitation/acquisition policy and will also have completed a brochure describing the services to be offered by NARA that the organizations could distribute to their members. The brochure will also be distributed widely to other organizations with the first targets being the large number of spring meetings of regional archival associations. NARA will also report on the progress made by then in database development and retrieval capacity.

Announcements and Publicity

The participants advocated the immediate preparation and distribution of a press release describing the conclusions of the conference.

Announcement of the availability of expanded services from the National Archives Library would be delayed until NARA was fully ready to provide responses on a broader scale. NARA staff believed that it would take until late winter or early spring to prepare the necessary mechanisms.

Announcement of the formal creation of ARIC would occur after all five of the governing boards had met and acted on the conference recommendations. Dates for these meetings are: NAGARA, July 20; AIIM, third week in August; SAA, September 1; AASLH, first week in October; and ARMA, end of October.

ACTIONS FOLLOWING THE CONFERENCE

Distribution of Press Release

A press release was mailed on July 13, 1987, to more than 120 archival, records management, library, and other information-related organizations and publications.

Report on the Conference

This report on the conference discussions and recommendations was prepared by Victoria Walch. A draft was distributed to all participants on July 13, 1987, for their review and comments. This revised and corrected final version is being issued in early August.

Actions by Governing Boards

Because it was meeting in late July before the final version of the report was available, the NAGARA board was asked to act on the recommendations contained in the draft. It approved the recommendations and NAGARA's participation in ARIC on July 25, 1987. The other organizations will have the final version prior to the next scheduled meetings of their boards.

Prepared and distributed by Victoria Irons Walch

August 5, 1987

CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS

Name/institution or organization	Representing
Vivian J. Arterbery Executive Director, NCLIS	National Commission on Libraries and Information Science
Frank G. Burke Acting Archivist of the United States	National Archives and Records Administration
John F. Burns Vice President, NAGARA State Archivist, California	National Association of Government Archives & Records Administrators
Katherine Coram Coordinator, Records Administration Information Center, NARA	National Archives and Records Administration
Marilyn Courtot Director, Standards & Technology, AIIM	Association for Information and Image Management
Bruce W. Dearstyne Executive Director, NAGARA Dir, External Programs, NY State Archives	National Association of Government Archives & Records Administrators
Linda V. Ellsworth President, AASLH National Trust for Historic Preservation	American Association for State and Local History
Frank B. Evans Deputy Assistant Archivist for Records Administration, NARA	National Archives and Records Administration
Richard A. Jacobs Acting Executive Director, NHPRC	National Historical Publications and Records Commission
William L. Joyce President, SAA Princeton University	Society of American Archivists
Wayne Masterman Council of State Governments	Council of State Governments
Page Putnam Miller Director, NCC	National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History
Donn C. Neal Executive Director, SAA	Society of American Archivists

Patrick Nolan Reference Works/Access Program, NEH	National Endowment for the Humanities
Michelle Pacifico Archivist, Program Policy & Evaluation Division, NARA	National Archives and Records Administration
Trudy Huskamp Peterson Assistant Archivist for the National Archives, NARA	National Archives and Records Administration
Martin Richelsoph, CRM Executive Vice President, ARMA State of Arizona	Association of Records Managers and Administrators
Jane Rosenberg Director, Reference Works/Access, NEH	National Endowment for the Humanities
Marilyn Ryall Coordinator, NICLOG	National Information Center on Local Government Records (NICLOG)
Nancy Sahli Acting Director, Records Program, NHPRC	National Historical Publications and Records Commission
Maxine Sitts SPEC Coordinator, ARL	Association of Research Libraries' Systems & Procedures Exchange Ctr
Robert Sloan Dallas (TX) City Secretary Chair, Records Management Committee, IIMC	International Institute of Municipal Clerks
Merrily A. Smith National Preservation Program Office, LC	Preservation Clearinghouse Project Library of Congress
Raymond Smock Office for the Bicentennial U.S. House of Representatives	Documentary Heritage Trust of the United States
Carolyn H. Sung Executive Officer of Research Services, LC	Library of Congress
Adrienne C. Thomas Director, Program Policy & Evaluation Division, NARA	National Archives and Records Administration
Larry E. Tise Incoming Executive Director, AASLH	American Association for State and Local History
Victoria Irons Walch Consulting Archivist	Archival Information Clearinghouse Project